

Article appeared
on page A-21

14 May 1979

Oreg SALT

Rowland Evans and Robert Novak

Consigning Turkey To the Junkyard

Echoes of incendiary anti-American propaganda beamed into Iran from the Soviet Union just before the fall of the shah are now being heard in Turkey, leading presidential advisers to this chilling conclusion: Moscow believes Turkey is ripe for destabilization.

In private, the Turkish government is seeking emergency help from Washington to reduce murderous street violence, tamp down an economic crisis and bring Turkey back as a full-fledged member of the Western alliance. But in a case study of errors, the Carter administration has let precious time slip by—perhaps too much time.

As a result, the single most ingenious and innovative post-World War II decision by the United States—President Truman's 1947 Greek-Turkish aid program—may be headed for the junkyard of history. It would reside there alongside Washington's other postwar alliances with Iran and Pakistan.

That would directly affect the Middle East, rich with oil that both West and East desperately want. In the absence of the U.S.-Turkish alliance, the Middle East would be more vulnerable to Moscow. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) would be a dead letter in the eastern Mediterranean.

What's more, the unwanted trip to the junkyard comes just when Carter desperately needs monitoring stations in Turkey for the new SALT II agreement, replacing bases lost in Iran. But Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher returned from his recent rescue mission to Ankara with very little progress toward agreement. It is at this bleak moment that the Kremlin has unlimbered its propaganda guns used to such good effect in Iran.

The propaganda zeroes in on the new counterguerrilla "fascists" of the West. "NATO is the main supporter of the fascist escalation in the country," a Romanian-based clandestine transmitter purred last week. "NATO is behind the murderous fascist dens, the counter-guerrilla organization and those aspiring to a fascist military coup." Three days later, a U.S. soldier stationed in Turkey was murdered—the second such killing in a week.

Two years ago, Jimmy Carter had little expectation of conditions in Turkey presaging the end of Harry Truman's great postwar experiment.

Carter had inherited an ideal safety-valve from the Ford administration—a four-year defense cooperation agreement (DCA). It would not only have ended the arms embargo imposed by Congress under pressure from the Greek lobby, but would have reopened closed U.S. bases for a price-tag of only \$1 billion in arms and economic aid.

That was torpedoed by the Greek lobby, aided diligently by Vice President Walter F. Mondale. Sen. Paul Sarbanes of Maryland, Senate kingpin of the lobby, has beaten a steady path to the vice president's door. Carter was persuaded, partly on grounds of cleansing himself of Ford-Kissinger taint, to dump the four-year agreement and go to Congress for a straight up-or-down vote ending the arms embargo.

The president deserves credit for winning that test last summer, reopening U.S. bases for one year. But his decision to dump Henry Kissinger's document to placate the Greek lobby has now boxed him in just as Turkey's importance to the United States has reached a new height because of Iran. Here is a textbook case of sacrificing good policy for bad politics.

Turkey, suffering from economic paralysis and social disruption that has imposed martial law over one-fourth of the country, needs far more today than it did before. That means the budget-conscious Carter will now have to raise the ante far above the amount in the ditched Ford agreement, and in return will get a devalued Turkish alliance.

If Carter had stuck to the Kissinger-tainted agreement and used the same clout on Congress to pass it that he used to end the arms embargo, Turkey today would not be in such straitened circumstances. Nor would the United States have to worry about permission to use Turkey as a SALT monitor in place of Iran. Instead, Carter played to the Greek lobby, and Turkey is today ripe for Moscow's nudge toward destabilization.

With the failure of Christopher's mission to Ankara, the president is heading toward another cliff-hanger: how to persuade the Turks not to shut down U.S. bases in October even if no new defense agreement has been signed by them.

So, the Soviets are using their escalated radio broadcasts to finish the work insensibly started by the U.S. Congress with its arms embargo and systematically reduce American ties with Turkey. For the first time, specialists here believe the Russians might possibly pull it off.

©1978, Field Enterprises, Inc.